

The President. Well, I made a very strong statement when I was in Moscow about this, and I think, in a way, if anybody ought to have credibility to defend the freedom of the press, I should. [Laughter] So I did, and I will continue to.

If there is some other reason for the arrest—I don't know what the facts are, I don't think we necessarily know all the facts, but I do not believe people should be arrested solely because of what they say in exercising their role as members of the press. I don't believe that. And I think the United States has to take a very firm position on that. I do not believe democracy is weakened by dissent, even if it is unfair and sometimes even if it's false, because I think in the end, if the debate is open, the people usually get it right. That's why our democracy is still around here after over 200 years.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:55 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Medicare recipient Ruth Westfall; former Senator Howard H. Baker, Jr., and former Representative Lee H. Hamilton, appointed to lead a Presidential Commission to investigate possible security breaches at the Los Alamos National Laboratory; and Chairman Yasser Arafat of the Palestinian Authority. A reporter referred to Col. George Trofimoff, USA (Ret.), who was arrested in Florida on June 14 and charged with espionage.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Electronic Signatures Legislation

June 14, 2000

I am pleased that the House today adopted the electronic signatures conference report by an overwhelming vote. I expect similar support in the Senate for this bipartisan agreement and look forward to signing this key legislation into law.

This historic legislation will ensure that our consumer protections apply when Americans do business on-line. It will encourage the information technology revolution that has helped lower inflation, raise productivity, and spur new research and development. By marrying one of our oldest values—our com-

mitment to consumer protection—with the newest technologies, we can achieve the full measure of the benefits that E-commerce has to offer. My congratulations to the Democratic and Republican leaders of the conference committee who worked together to forge this landmark legislation.

Statement on House of Representatives Action on Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations Legislation

June 14, 2000

Today the House of Representatives narrowly passed on a partisan vote the Departments of Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and related agencies appropriations bill. This legislation fails to address critical needs of the American people and short changes our efforts to help our students achieve higher standards in the classroom.

The House bill invests too little in our schools and demands too little from them. It fails to strengthen accountability and turn around failing schools, reduce class size, provide funds for emergency repairs and renovating aging schools, sufficiently expand after-school opportunities, help prepare low income students for college through GEAR UP, and programs to improve teacher quality, and help bridge the digital divide. It underfunds child care and fails to adequately invest in Head Start. This bill also cuts funding for public health priorities, including mental health and substance abuse services, family planning, health care access for the uninsured, nursing home quality, family caregiver support, and infectious diseases.

In addition, the bill makes deep cuts in worker training programs and cuts programs that ensure safe and healthy workplaces, enforce domestic labor laws, and help address child labor abuses at home and abroad. Regrettably, the bill also includes language prohibiting the Department of Labor from finalizing its standard to protect the Nation's workers from ergonomic injuries.

A bill that fails to provide key resources for education, child care, worker training, and other priorities is unacceptable. If it

were presented to me in its current form, I would veto it. I continue to hope my administration can work with Congress on a bipartisan basis to develop a bill that strengthens our country's education system, adequately funds public health priorities, addresses the needs of our Nation's workers, and provides for other important national priorities.

**Message to the Congress
Transmitting a Report on
Proliferation of Weapons
of Mass Destruction**

June 14, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

Enclosed is a report to the Congress on Executive Order 12938, as required by section 204 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1703(c)) and section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1641(c)).

William J. Clinton

The White House,
June 14, 2000.

**Message to the Congress on
Continuation of the National
Emergency With Respect to the
Lapse of the Export Administration
Act of 1979**

June 14, 2000

To the Congress of the United States:

As required by section 204 of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (50 U.S.C. 1703(c)) and section 401(c) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1641(c)), I transmit herewith a 6-month periodic report on the national emergency declared by Executive Order 12924 of August 19, 1994, to deal with the threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States caused by the lapse of the Export Administration Act of 1979.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
June 14, 2000.

**Remarks Prior to Discussions With
Chairman Yasser Arafat of the
Palestinian Authority and an
Exchange With Reporters**

June 15, 2000

Middle East Peace Process

The President. Good morning, everyone. I'm delighted to have Chairman Arafat and his team back here again, and I'm looking forward to our conversation.

Q. Do you fear that the Palestinian track is in danger of collapse, Mr. President?

The President. No, I think it's an important moment, and we just have to keep working on it.

Q. Mr. President, are you going to put any pressure on the Palestinians concerning the third redeployment, which is supposed to happen on the 23d of this month?

The President. What I would like to do today is just get on to our business and our conversation and not say very much. If we're going to make peace, we're going to have to deal with the difficult issues, and the less we say now, the better, I think.

Q. Mr. President, President Arafat was reported to be very upset with the way the Israelis are handling the negotiation. What is your assessment now, especially as time is running out before the deadline of September 13th?

The President. I don't think I should characterize what's going on. I can only tell you that I want to finish the job, and I'd like to see it finished on time.

NOTE: The exchange began at 9:44 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. A tape was not available for verification of the content of this exchange.

**Remarks at the White House
Strategy Session on Improving
Hispanic Student Achievement**

June 15, 2000

Thank you very much, and good afternoon. I have received a good report on what you have done so far, and I want to get right into our program, but I would like to make a few remarks first. I'd like to thank Governor